

William Martyn's grave

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Botusfleming

Although he inherited considerable lands upon the death of his father, William Martyn never lost his compassion for the less fortunate. Describing himself as a Catholic Christian in the 'true, not Popish', sense of the word, he appeared to be an honest, good natured man, willing to do all he could for his fellow humans.

His prime concern however, was the suffering he witnessed as the poor of the parish were prepared to undergo starvation and self neglect in order to pay for their eventual Christian burial. Money that he felt should be spent on feeding and clothing their families was being squandered in the misguided belief (promoted by the church) that corpses, wrongly situated or not given the appropriate Christian rituals, would be disadvantaged on Judgement day.

He wished his own interment to be a watershed, an indicator that an unconsecrated burial did not deny future salvation. He hoped that others would be encouraged to follow suit and generate a trend for cheaper, less elaborate funerals.

His will adequately expressed his desire ...

"As to my corpse, let it not be washed, let the woollen waistcoat that be on it at my death remain in it, and let one of the sides of my worsted night-gown, being separated from the other, cover my corpse instead of a shroud, and (on) my head a woollen cap, and when it shall have laid two or three days in a wainscot coffin, let it be put in a leaden one (the lead may be omitted) and afterwards, at any convenient time, let it be carried in a hearse to the most barren field in my estate called Botusfleming and there a grave being prepared in the most elevated part of it, and as near the middle of the field as it may be, let my corpse be therein laid, and decently covered with earth. Let my corpse be attended to its grave from the place it is conveyed through nearest the house of Botusfleming and decently placed therein by six honest poor men not receiving pay from any parish and whom to clothe may be a charity, preferring those of the borough of Plymouth to others not more needy ... "

Location

William died in November 1762 and his grave, surrounded by railings, can now be seen in the distance from the adjacent road. It is surmounted by a pyramid style plinth. It lies in a field opposite Botusfleming church, some 5 kilometres north west of Plymouth.

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